Preface

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This book is for the next generation of managers

This book has been written for the next generation of managers. We strongly believe that when it comes to innovation they need to be educated with something more than the traditional Newtonian scientific framework. The managers of today need to understand the power and hope that comes from looking at the world through the framework of living systems. The book has been written with students in mind and specifically for those in programs in which experience and service design are central, such as leisure, tourism, events, hospitality, games and media, and entertainment management. These types of programs have an untapped 'systemic potential' as we will demonstrate in this book, a potential to educate students and executives to reframe and transform whole systems by inspiration and creative liberation instead of obligation and ever more rules and regulations.

This book on *Advanced Imagineering* aims to show these and other students, managers and entrepreneurs that designing and managing experiences is not just an end in itself in the experience industries, as has been articulated in the Imagineering books so far. This book articulates that, increasingly, designing and managing experiences is a means to an innovation-end in all kinds of other industries and systems. With this book we show the reader that the competence of Imagineering has more uses and is more broadly and widely applicable in a networked world than just the experience industries with which Imagineering is often spontaneously associated.

This book is written for open-minded managers who sense that they are on a threshold of something new and are looking for fresh know-how in order to become more effective in today's dynamic and complex, networked world. For these managers, this book links the Big Shift in society today with the Big Shift that is going on in science and describes the connection in terms of managerial operating logic. The design logic of thinking and acting towards evolution rather than towards a solution will make them more effective in today's world with disruption emerging all around them and in all industries. This book ultimately shows how strategically well-designed and well-managed poetic language can turn a conventional bureaucracy into what Charles Landry (2018) calls a 'Creative bureaucracy'. This is a bureaucracy in which the collective creativity is liberated in strategic ways so as to be able to flourish in a networked world. The book shows that poetic language has not only the capacity to move people, to make them see the world anew, but that it has also the potential to mobilize collectives to act differently.

The first part of this book will appeal to those who are interested in the science and philosophy underlying Imagineering and how it relates to conventional

Design Thinking and innovation. It is probably ambitious for most bachelor students but necessary in the longer term for them to become truly effective social architects. The second part of the book will appeal to those who want to use the design approach of Imagineering in practice. This second part is very much a 'how to' guide including frameworks and checklists. The aim is to bring the Imagineering concepts alive by illustrating them with real-life examples.

This book is about innovation and design in a networked world

The world is transitioning from an industrial era characterized by its mechanical focus on innovation as 'expert innovation' to a networked era characterized by its ecological focus on 'experience innovation'. Expert innovation was largely confined to research and development (R&D) departments; we are all involved in experience innovation as co-creators. Accordingly, innovation and design are entering the social sciences and the management and business schools. All too often, however, this new, emerging field of study is approached through the existing mechanical view on Design Thinking, service design and even experience design. This is understandable perhaps since this view stems from the roots of 'industrial design' as developed in previous decades at the more technically oriented universities.

This book is meant to complement the 'material' view on innovation and design with a 'human systems' view. Innovating a human system is simply not the same as innovating material systems. Design in Systems Thinking is simply not the same as design in conventional Design Thinking. I believe that in contrast to material innovators, human system innovators usually aim to design and do something today that improves the system tomorrow.

The existing 'mechanical' view of the world locks today's managers and politicians into a 'hyper-simplification that makes us blind to the complexity of reality'. This often leads to what French philosopher Morin calls 'mutilating actions'. The 'mechanical' view of the world leads to a limited, linear and material view on innovation and design. There are examples of this all around us that appear daily in the media – for instance the suggestion to build a wall or a fence as a solution for migration or to build shelters as a solution for homelessness. These are 'touchpoint solutions' that fail to take into account the deeper reasons for why these problems exist in the first place; these 'solutions' can actually harm the system further instead of healing it. If we have a 'mechanical' view of the world, we are obsessed with 'solving' problems. The obsession prevails even when the problems at stake cannot be solved but must be coped with in terms of empowerment and evolution. Fortunately, the emerging 'ecological' view of the world can throw a whole new, complementary light on innovation and design in a hyperconnected world.

The journey that led to this book

This book began with my experiences at the turn of the 21st century applying 'High Concept Thinking' in everyday organizations outside the creative

industries, trying to help them flourish again. Thinking in terms of a High Concept is a typical and crucial part of the creative industries. You need to boil down your ideas to their absolute essence and then try to verbally capture an imagined world in such a way that it inspires people both internally as co-creators and externally as participants, visitors or spectators. High Concept Thinking is always about inspiring people on both 'sides' to create a new world of value. A High Concept is just like poetry in that its aim is to stimulate the reader to think in new ways, and to make them feel something new so as to make them act differently. A well-designed High Concept can set the stage for generating a new, desired reality and trigger 'innovation as collective creation'.

The experiments with High Concept Thinking in everyday organizations, such as retail chains and cities, have fascinated me for nearly two decades now. I have discovered that this kind of Design Thinking that is typical for the creative industries also has the power to innovate whole systems. I discovered that the experience perspective is a very powerful frame of reference for innovation in times of hyperconnectivity. In such times, innovation is no longer solely about producing better smartphones; it is about innovating with many people together as is the case, for example, in organizational innovation or whole system innovation. Imagineers as social architects can design a High Concept that sets the stage for 'innovation as collective creation' in all kind of industries. This book is the result of our research, experiments and reflections on the innovation potential of the experience perspective.

Our first book on Imagineering, entitled 'Creating Worlds of Experiences', was written in Dutch in 2002 together with my Breda University of Applied Sciences colleague Frank Peters. Right after it was published I received an invitation from the Strategic Director of one of the biggest advertising agencies in Belgium. He had read our book and was struck in particular by one of the examples we highlighted: KetnetCool*** in the Sportpaleis in Antwerp, which is a large event for kids from the Flemish public TV-channel. Ever since its first edition in 1998, this event has attracted some 50,000 participants each year. There are more than 300 co-creators involved and there are kids themselves reporting on screen and in print. It always brings fascinating family warmth to the Christmas holidays. This all felt like 'magic' to the Strategic Director, who worked daily with organizations that were struggling with the impact of growing connectivity. He felt that it was a kind of 'collective art' that he wanted to understand more about.

So I was invited, together with his Creative Director, to consider what High Concept Thinking could do for some of their most challenging accounts. The first account we looked at was the Belgian retail chain Veritas, which at that time was nearly bankrupt. Veritas was then over 100 years old and had some 60 shops selling sewing materials for women who made their own clothes. The CEO of Veritas told me candidly that he tried all the conventional strategies and that he was willing to do whatever it took if I could come up with just one good idea to help the retail chain flourish again. This was the start of a revolutionary experiment. Even today, shifting the mental models and the business models from profit to purpose still feels revolutionary.

The revolution for Veritas started in 2003. We reframed the identity of the company and described the envisioned experience world in the poetic words: ‘Veritas, Express Yourself’. People internally and externally started to wonder what this might mean for their daily actions. External people started to see the retail chain differently. Internal staff started to act creatively together in Friday afternoon design team sessions. What emerged was a whole new world of experiences. There were maker workshops in the shops; an atelier; a magazine that was produced and distributed by Sanoma, and a TV spin-off called *The Designers* on Flemish commercial TV. The whole system of Veritas started to self-organize its way to recovery. Veritas became the retail chain of the year in 2011 and even today the chain is still flourishing.

Shortly after the Veritas experience, I read the afterword that organizational scientist Peter Senge (2005) wrote in a new book that appeared at that time: *The World Café: Shaping our futures through conversations that matter*, by Juanita Brown and David Isaacs (2005):

All my life I have been drawn to the puzzle of collective creating. How is it that sometimes, as if by magic, people create something together, which has beauty, power and life? A sports team that suddenly moves to another plateau where the game is no longer the game but a vehicle for an aesthetic statement (and yet the game is still there). A symphony orchestra that disappears into the music. A dance troupe that ceases being individual dancers. An individual racer who joyously hugs her ‘opponents’ at the end of the race, knowing that it was only from their collective striving that her performance was possible.

This question has drawn me and guided me, but it has worried me as well. Do the recurring examples of collective creating only happen in sporting events or in the performing arts? Is this why singing, dancing, drumming, running, and jumping have bound human cultures together for all our history? But these activities are less central in modern cultures, and as adults, we are more likely to encounter them as spectators than as participants. Instead, our lives revolve around teaching, parenting, doctoring, and coping with countless daily stresses. As one of many who have argued that collective creating can be cultivated in our daily working lives, I worry that the case has been overstated. While the possibility is undeniable, the practices for reliably realizing that possibility have remained elusive.

Recognizing what Peter Senge was worrying about, we started to organize our research at Breda University around the following question: how can the design approach of Imagineering help a bureaucracy transform into what Charles Landry calls a ‘creative bureaucracy’? Or to put it another way, how can High Concept Thinking and poetic language effectuate experience innovation leading to ‘innovation as collective creation’? This question has kept us busy ever since (including a doctoral thesis) and will most probably do so for the rest of our professional lives. However, a recent conversation convinced me that we should pause our research for a bit and concentrate on writing this book.

The conversation was with one of the members of the Board of Surplus. Surplus is a healthcare organization in the south of the Netherlands with 3,000

employees and 3,000 volunteers that we have had the privilege to work with over the past two years. He said:

I know that together we have discovered a major key in how to transform bureaucracies into ‘creative bureaucracies’. Reframing the identity of a health care system in poetic language as we did with ‘See Me’ [see Chapter 4 for more about this case and a reference to a 20-minute movie] is a very powerful way to unlock and sustain collective creativity in a more desired direction. Well-designed and well-managed poetic language can set the stage for the collective creation of ‘beauty’ and heal the system at the same time. It is indeed beauty that I see appear everywhere in the organization. Besides of the emergence of beauty, we can report a structural improvement in the rate of absence of employees in the departments that are already operating with ‘See Me’. And no, we are not there yet. And we have to stay humble since all innovation is human endeavor and therefore vulnerable. But I know this system is healing itself now and it is moving ‘From Rules to Relation’ as all actors in the healthcare system in the Netherlands are aiming for this.

I realized that the field of innovation urgently needs to become a matter of collective creation.

The core argument of this book

We have a design problem today, rather than a management problem. So says Paul Hawken in *The Ecology of Commerce* (Hawken, 1993:55). He believes that we must learn to design systems ‘where doing good is like falling off a log, where the natural, everyday acts of work and life accumulate into a better world as a matter of course, not a matter of conscious altruism’. The concept of Design Thinking is indeed rising up the agenda of management. Nevertheless, Design Thinking remains overlooked and oversimplified in much of today’s management practice and education as it is often defined as the process of empathizing and rapid prototyping in relation to products and services. As such, the impact on managerial decision thinking has been limited.

We argue that, in order to be effective in management, conventional ‘Newtonian’ Design Thinking should be extended with complex systems Design Thinking. It should also be executed by the CEOs, strategists and policy makers themselves. In this book we present the argument that ‘High Concept Thinking’ is a way forward to do just that. Managers in today’s networked world must learn to set the stage to make something that feels like magic: a small intervention that generates an important, big effect. They have to learn to set the stage for ‘innovation as collective creation’. They are the ones that can help ‘people create something together which has beauty, power and life’ (Senge, 2005). It follows that management education must develop its own Design Thinking ‘toolbox’.

What Imagineering can bring you

‘We are still in the Barbarian times of our thinking’ according to the French philosopher Morin (2008:6). I think he is telling us in a deliberately shocking way that we might be less sophisticated in our thinking than we think we are right now. Most people are still locked into mechanistic logic in all that they do. They do not even realize that their worldview is somewhat outdated. My colleagues and I at Breda University believe that it is time to become more nuanced in our thinking. We think that studying the basics of complexity science in relation to innovation and design can open our eyes in the right direction. Our opinion is that we have celebrated the genius of the few for way too long without seeing the potential of the many. This has to change because innovation is in the DNA of all of us. New and different ideas emerge when we collaborate in coping with complex issues and a new future becomes possible for us all. We strongly believe that knowledge matters.

We have observed over the last decade that the young people we teach often become very inspired with Imagineering. The discovery that the analytic, reductionist scientific perspective has a complement in the living systems is something that clearly resonates with their experiences in the networked society. They see that this new perspective works in a holistic, systemic way to generate new order instead of fragmentation. However, it is the principle that small interventions can result in big effects that inspires them the most. They discover that they can play a role in society and they feel that even young people can make change happen. From this moment on, they seem to loosen up and their study becomes a real engagement for life. We are very confident that students who study Imagineering and its impact will as a result act differently as leaders and managers.

When working with executives, we have observed that many organizations do a fairly good job of using certain elements of innovation. However, the piecemeal approach is rarely effective in today’s connected society. Today, more than ever, systems are the frameworks of our lives. The solar system, the organizations, the human body – these are all living systems in which all the component parts work together to keep the body flourishing. Innovation in this context is so much more than realizing better products, processes or services; innovation becomes first and foremost about optimizing (some scholars even speak about ‘healing’) the system as a whole. Imagineering is an experience-based systems approach to innovation and creativity management. It is uniquely suited to the values, beliefs and organizational challenges that face managers, politicians, entrepreneurs and leaders today. Imagineering is a design process for whole system innovation that can enable you to:

- not only do the work better, but do better work;
- cope effectively with the new players in your industry;
- learn faster and innovate faster than your competitors;
- become a continuous innovator in a strategic, desired direction;
- unlock collective creativity in that same desired direction;
- engage your workforce in a more meaningful way; and

- engage internal as well as external stakeholders in co-creating value with you.

We are perfectly aware that a book cannot change your actions directly but we hope that it can change your mind. This book is intended to trigger you to think differently and to see things in a different way. From then on it is up to you to decide whether what you read is so fascinating that you try to act upon your new insights or not. We, of course, hope you will.

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